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# LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN IRELAND.

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# LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN IRELAND.

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## The Irish Revolution of 1898.

VERY few Irishmen have yet realized that in the year 1898 a change was made in the government of Ireland greater than that made by many famous revolutions. Up to that date the mass of the Irish people had no more power over the local government of their own country than over the government of Russia. In that year, at one blow, the Local Government Act swept away the old aristocratic and oligarchical authorities, and substituted a system of government more popular and democratic than that enjoyed by Frenchmen under their Republic.

## The Old and the New.

Let us contrast the old governing bodies with the new. Before 1898, the Irish Counties were governed by Grand Juries. Each Grand Jury was chosen by the Sheriff, who was appointed by the Lord Lieutenant. The people had nothing to do with it: the Sheriff might select whom he pleased, except that he had to select from each barony one Juror holding freehold land worth £50, or leasehold land worth £100.

As the Grand Jury met only twice a year, most of the real work was done by the Boards of Guardians of the Poor Law Unions. The people had hardly more voice in the election of these Boards than in the selection of the Grand Juries, because half the Guardians were Justices of the Peace, sitting by right of their office, without any election at all; and the other half, though elected by vote, were chosen by the large property owners under a system of plural voting which gave many of them six votes apiece, and under which it was possible for one rich man to have as many as thirty-six votes.

All that is done away with now. County government will be carried on in future by County Councils and District Councils, elected just as Members of Parliament are. Every ratepayer, every occupier and lodger, whether rated or not, has a vote in the election of these Councils; and no man, however rich he may be, has more than one vote. Peers can vote and women can vote. Nothing is left of the old powers of the Grand Juries, though they were allowed to nominate three members to *the first* Councils elected, to instruct the new bodies in the routine of County business. In future an Irish Grand Jury will be no more than an English one has been for the last two hundred years: that is, a committee to decide whether persons accused of crime shall be put to their trial or not. Outside the towns, the old Guardians are gone; and the District Councillors act as Guardians of the Poor in their stead. It now rests with the Irish nation to see that the new County government by the people is better than the old County government by the Castle and the landed gentry.

## New Rents and New Rates.

### IN THE COUNTRY.

The first thing the Irish agricultural tenant will want to know is how the change will alter his rent and the half of the Poor Rate which his landlord used to allow him out of it. This cannot be told him off-hand. It requires a little explanation, as follows:—

Under the old system, the County Cess (the Grand Jury rate) and the Poor Rate (the Guardians' rate) were paid in full by the landlords and tenants between them. But the English Government has agreed for the future to pay half the rates on agricultural land (not on buildings). Only, the Government judges what is a fair half by the year 1897, and will never pay more than half what that year's Cess and Rate came to. So if the rates rise above the 1897 figure, the ratepayers will have to make up the difference. This is why 1897 is called "the Standard Year." In future, therefore, the Lord Lieutenant will pay to the County Councils every year a sum equal to half what was raised on agricultural land in the Standard Year. This payment is called the Agricultural Grant. A further sum will come from the Government as Licence Duties and Imperial Grants. The remainder of the money required by the County Council will have to be paid *by the occupier* as Poor Rate; but he will not be allowed to deduct half of it from his rent as he did formerly. The County Cess is done away with altogether.

This will leave the Irish tenants no worse off than they are at present. Many of them will be better off. Although there will be no County Cess to pay, the same money will have to be raised under the name of Poor Rate; still, the Government will pay half of it, so that the tenant will save half the Standard Year County Cess. To set against this, the tenant will not be able to get back half the old Poor Rate from his landlord out of the rent; but then he will only have half of it to pay so long as the rate is not higher than it was in the Standard Year, because the Lord Lieutenant will pay the other half; so that unless the rates go up he will lose nothing, though the landlord will gain. Consequently in the ordinary case of the tenant who used to pay County Cess and Poor Rate, and get half the Poor Rate allowed out of his rent, the new arrangement will benefit the tenant by half the 1897 County Cess, and benefit the landlord by half the 1897 Poor Rate. Both of them will gain; but as the tenant gets control through his new vote of the new system of local government, whilst the landlord loses all his old votes but one, the tenant has much the best of the bargain politically.

But there are some tenants who used to deduct half the County Cess from their rents. They can now claim a reduction of their rent by the amount of half their 1897 County Cess. Those who used to be allowed the whole County Cess have the same right: their rent is reduced by the whole of their 1897 Cess. But where the tenant used to be allowed the whole of his Poor Rate, his rent is now reduced, not by the whole, but by half the 1897 Poor Rate. And in holdings under £4 value, where the landlord used to pay the Poor Rate, the tenant will have to pay it in future; and his rent will be reduced by only half the 1897 Poor Rate.

One sort of tenant will have his rent raised ; and that is the man who used to pay the whole Poor Rate and not have any of it allowed him out of his rent. In future his rent will be raised by the amount of half his Standard Year Poor Rate. But though this will benefit the landlord it will not hurt the tenant, because what he loses by the addition to his rent he saves by the Government paying half his rates.

#### IN THE TOWNS.

In the cities and towns and "urban districts," there is this great difference : that the Government does not pay half the rates, because the Agricultural Grant cannot be applied to houses or buildings, only to agricultural land. In future the occupiers will have to pay all the rates ; but their rents will be reduced by the amount of whatever rates the landlord paid for them or allowed them out of their rent for the Standard Year.

Certain separate items of the Poor Rate in towns, concerning railway, harbor, and public health charges, will still be deducted from the rent as before ; and tenants in urban districts holding under a lease for lives, or a lease with five years still to run in 1899, will continue paying and deducting without alteration.

#### TOWN AND COUNTRY ALIKE.

No agreement between landlord and tenant stands good against these changes. The tenant must pay the Poor Rate in future, whether his agreement says so or not ; and the landlord must reduce the rent when the Act says it is to be reduced, in spite of any agreement to the contrary.

The Lord Lieutenant will not under any circumstances pay a share of the expenses of extra police, or of compensation for criminal injuries. These will form a separate item of the Poor Rate, and must be paid in full by the tenant.

#### The New Act.

We have now to describe the sort of local government that the new Act has set up :—

First, for the Counties, we have the new **County Councils** in place of the Grand Juries. The cities of Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Londonderry and Waterford will also, as County Boroughs, have each a separate County Council.

Second, for the old Poor Law Unions, now called County Districts (Rural for the country and Urban for the towns), we have **District Councils**. In the Rural Districts the District Council takes the place of the old Board of Guardians and the old Baronial Presentment Sessions. But in the Urban Districts (the towns) the Guardians are still separately elected, though in the same manner and at the same time as District Councillors.

The expenses of both the Counties and the County Districts are to be defrayed by the new Poor Rate, which includes the old Poor Rate and County Cess, and by the Agricultural Grant, etc., from the Imperial Government, as already explained. The County Council collects the Poor Rate, except in the Urban Districts, where it will be collected by the District Council. The County Councils and the Guardians can raise money for special purposes by borrowing ; but all such sums must be paid off within sixty years.



## **The County Franchise.**

Both County and District Councils are elected by those who are entitled to vote at the Parliamentary elections. Women and peers who would be on the Parliamentary register if they were men or commoners can also vote.

### **Qualifications of County Councillors.**

Any person qualified to vote for the County Councils can be elected to sit on them, except women, infants, aliens, County Coroners, the clergy (whether Catholic, Protestant, or Dissenting), bankrupts, paid officers of the Councils, persons who have received union relief within twelve months of the election, and persons who within five years of the election have been sentenced to imprisonment with hard labor without the option of a fine for any crime. A similar sentence of imprisonment, or the acceptance of union relief, disqualifies a Councillor already elected.

### **Disqualification to Prevent Jobbery.**

Another disqualification is that of persons concerned in contracts with the Councils. Partners of such persons are also disqualified. But this disqualification does not extend to the proprietor of a newspaper inserting Council advertisements, nor to persons selling land or lending money to the Council, nor to persons supplying material taken off their own land for making County roads and bridges, nor to persons who are interested in County contracts only as shareholders in Joint Stock Companies.

### **Qualifications of District Councillors.**

The qualifications and disqualifications for seats on the District Councils are the same as for the County Councils, with two important exceptions. 1. Women can sit on the District Councils. 2. Twelve months residence in the district is as good a qualification as the possession of a vote. Consequently any twelve months' resident, being of full age and not disqualified under any of the heads given above, may be elected a District Councillor, whether a County elector or not.

### **Period for which Councils are Elected.**

All the County and Rural District Councillors hold office for three years, at the end of which period all must retire together, and new Councils be elected. In the six County Boroughs: Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Londonderry and Waterford, the old system of one-third of the Councillors retiring annually may be continued; but the Council can alter this by passing a resolution by a two-thirds majority calling on the Local Government Board to substitute the three years system.

### **Elections and Voters.**

The elections are conducted under rules made by the Local Government Board. The notice of election is to be given not less than thirty-five clear days before the day of election. The Returning Officer is appointed by the County Council; and he must appoint a deputy for the election of Rural District Councillors. This deputy acts as the Clerk of the Rural District Council.

Each candidate must be nominated in writing by two electors ; and the nomination paper (which is provided by the Returning Officer or his deputy) must be handed in not later than 5 p.m. on the seventh day after the notice of election is given. Candidates can only withdraw within the week after the last day from the receipt of nomination papers.

Notice of the poll must be given ten clear days at least before the day of election, which must be held not more than seven days earlier or later than the first day of June.

The poll must remain open from six to eight in the evening ; and all polls in the same area must be held on the same day as far as practicable.

The rule at elections will be, "One Man, One Vote" ; but if an elector has votes in different counties he may use them all, if he can, provided he only votes once in each county.

Candidates may spend as much money as they like for election addresses, meetings, etc., and need not make any official return of the amounts. But they must not commit bribery, hold meetings on licensed premises, nor indulge in treating or other corrupt practice. The official expenses are paid out of the rates. All polls are taken by ballot, and are therefore secret. And each elector has one vote for each seat to be filled on the Council for his division. An elector can only vote in one division of any District.

### **Rural District Councils.**

The Rural District Council consists of a Chairman and Councillors, two members being elected for each electoral division of the Union. The first meeting of a Council is held on the fifth day after the elections. At this meeting, three additional Councillors may be chosen by the others. But these co-opted Councillors must be qualified to serve like the rest. Each Councillor is also a Guardian for his electoral division.

The Council may appoint a local committee for any part of its district ; and it may give seats on the committee to persons who are not Councillors. Such committees can, if the Council gives them leave, exercise all the powers of a District Council except that of raising money, and of appointing or removing officers, or altering their salaries.

### **What Rural District Councils can do.**

The two chief duties of a Rural District Council are, first, the care of the roads, bridges, etc., in the District (but not of the main roads, which are under the control of the County Council, though one-half of the expense of their maintenance is borne by the District) ; and second, the care of the public health.

At first sight these matters do not seem so exciting as national politics. But let us consider the matter a bit. The provision of good roads, the prevention of nuisances and of the adulteration of food, the non-contamination of the air, the efficient lighting of the district, the supply of pure water : these things make a much greater difference to the welfare and comfort of the inhabitants of any district than the questions which agitate Parliaments, whether they



sit at Westminster or College Green. When Dr. Johnson wrote, in Goldsmith's *Traveller*,

"How small of all that human hearts endure,  
That part that laws or kings can cause or cure,"

he was thinking of Parliaments, not of District Councils. *Their* laws can both cause and cure a great deal that comes home to the hearth of every cottager and the doorstep of every citizen. Think of the questions the District Council has to decide. Here are some of them:—Shall insanitary property be swept away, and healthy houses be provided for those who must otherwise, owing to lack of decent accommodation, live under unhealthy conditions? Shall the wages of those employed by the Council be based on the competition of starving men, without regard to the necessities and decencies of wholesome human existence, or be fixed by the Council at a standard below which it is inadvisable, in the interests of the community, that the earnings of its workers shall sink? Shall public works be carried out with or without the scamping and sweating practised by contractors who grasp at a larger profit than is compatible with thoroughly good workmanship or proper treatment of their workmen? The answers to such questions as these, not only affect the home comfort of every Irishman and Irishwoman in one way or another: they also involve principles which go to the very root of national politics.

Let us go into the particulars of what the Rural District Councils have to do. The sewers of the district vest in the Council, which must maintain and repair them, may purchase and construct new sewers, and has power to compel the owner of an undrained house to drain into its sewers if it is within 100 feet of a sewer. The Council can construct and maintain works for the disposal or disinfection of sewage. It may also make bye-laws respecting the structure of new buildings, and the description and quality of substances used in their construction, and the drainage of buildings generally. It may (and must if required so to do by the Local Government Board) itself undertake, or contract for, the scavenging and cleansing of the houses and streets in its district. And if on the certificate of the Medical Officer of Health or two medical practitioners it appears necessary, the Council may require any house which is in a filthy and unhealthy condition to be white-washed and otherwise purified. Swine or pig-styes must not be kept in the house, or so as to be a nuisance to other people.

The Council may provide the district, or any part of it, with a proper and sufficient water-supply, either by itself constructing and maintaining waterworks, or by leasing or (with the sanction of the Local Government Board) purchasing the works of any water company, or by contracting with any person for a supply of water. And for these purposes it may either charge a water-rate, or supply water at rents to be agreed on, or by measure. The Council may require houses to take a supply of water from it if the house is without a proper supply, and it can be done at a reasonable cost. It may dig wells and close polluted ones.

The Council has wide powers for the regulation of cellar dwellings, which are not allowed except under stringent conditions. It also has

to register common lodging-houses, and generally supervise them; and with the consent of the Local Government Board it may make bye-laws to put a stop to bad drainage, dirt, neglect and overcrowding in houses which, though let in lodgings, are not common lodging-houses. It has also extensive powers to prevent and abate nuisances, which term includes the overcrowding of houses and factories, and the sending forth of too much black smoke from chimneys (not being those of a private house). It can also take steps to prevent the spread of infectious diseases, and to provide mortuaries.

For the purpose of carrying out its duties as to public health, the Council appoints a Medical Officer of Health, who advises and reports to them as to the health of the district, and also makes an annual report to the Local Government Board; also an Inspector of Nuisances, who acts under the supervision of the Medical Officer and whose duty it is to discover and report all nuisances. Both the Medical Officer and Sanitary Inspector have power to inspect, condemn and seize any meat, fish, fruit, milk, vegetables, corn, bread, flour, or butter exposed or intended for sale, which appear to be unsound, unwholesome, or unfit for the food of man.

### Houses for the People.

The Council has most important powers under the Laborers' Acts, 1883-96. Twelve ratepayers or agricultural laborers can, by signing a representation, cause the powers under these Acts to be exercised. The representation must state, and give examples to prove, either (i) that the accommodation for laborers is deficient, or insanitary, or in a bad state of repair; or (ii) that the existing cottages are not provided with sufficient allotments, or that suitable land is needed as allotments for agricultural laborers living in neighboring villages or towns. It must also state that some plan (called "a scheme") is necessary to remedy the matters complained of. If the Council is satisfied, it may make a scheme, and

(i) purchase or lease land, and erect a sufficient number of cottages with proper sanitary arrangements, and a plot or garden to each not exceeding an acre; but it is not necessary to provide a garden;

(ii) purchase, repair, add to and improve existing cottages, and allot an acre of land to them;

(iii) provide, either by agreement, or, if the landlord is unwilling, by exercising compulsory powers, allotments of an acre for laborers in cottages belonging to the Council; or

(iv) close dwellings, or pull them down, if an inspector of the Local Government Board, when inquiring into a scheme, finds them unfit for habitation.

The above powers are most valuable; and every elector should insist on their being exercised should his district be lacking in healthy cottages.

Besides these powers under the Laborers' Acts, Rural District Councils have powers under Part II. of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890.

If the Medical Officer, or four householders, prove to the satisfaction of the Council that any buildings are so injurious to health as

to be unfit for human habitation, proceedings must be taken to close them ; and they may even be ordered to be pulled down.

And the Council has also power to deal with buildings which, though not themselves injurious to health, yet either stop the ventilation of other buildings, and so render them dangerous to health, or prevent proper measures being taken to remedy nuisances in other buildings.

The Council may also prepare a scheme for dealing with an area on which insanitary houses exist. This can be done in two cases :

(i) if an order has been made for the pulling down of any buildings, and it seems desirable that the ground on which such buildings stand should (*a*) be dedicated as a highway, or (*b*) itself be used, sold, or let, or be exchanged for other land more suitable, for the erection of dwellings for the working classes ;

or (ii) where it appears that the sanitary evils which are caused by the bad arrangement or condition of any buildings can only be remedied by the reconstruction and rearrangement of those buildings. But houses or lodgings must be built or found for the persons turned out under the scheme.

It is impossible here to mention all the steps which must be taken before any such scheme can be carried out. But it may be stated that, though compensation must be paid to the owners of the buildings included in a scheme, the amount is reduced if it is shown (*a*) that the rental was increased by the house being used for illegal purposes or being so overcrowded as to be injurious to its inmates' health ; or (*b*) that the house was in a state of defective sanitation or not in reasonably good repair ; or (*c*) that it was unfit and not reasonably capable of being made fit for human habitation.

The Rural District Councillors are also the Poor Law Guardians for the district.

A Rural District Council may obtain powers which generally are only possessed by an Urban District Council, if the Local Government Board so directs on the application of the County Council.

Such are the chief powers of a Rural District Council. Like all public powers, they can be used or abused, neglected or made the most of, according to the ability and good faith of the Councillors, and the public spirit and watchfulness of the electors.

### Urban District Councils.

These are endowed with larger powers, as they govern the towns, in which greater evils to health arise than in rural districts. They have all the powers of the Rural District Council, except that the Councillors are not Guardians. The Guardians are still separately elected ; but their old duties and powers, except those of relieving the poor, are transferred to the Councils. In addition to the powers of the Rural District Councils, they have the following :—

An Urban District Council can supply light to the houses in its district, either by contract with a company or by setting up gas-works or electric lighting stations of its own. And it may buy up an existing gas or electric light company.

It may also provide markets for the district, either by purchase of an existing one or otherwise ; but it cannot establish a market in



opposition to an existing one. It may also provide a slaughter-house.

The consent of the Council must be obtained before an offensive trade such as soap-boiling or tallow-melting can be established in its district. And the Council can take proceedings in respect of nuisances arising outside its district.

Public baths and wash-houses can be provided by the Council, which can either erect them itself, or contract with any person or company for the building of them, or purchase existing ones.

Besides the powers under Part II. of the Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890, possessed by Rural District Councils, and already described on page 8, an Urban District Council has powers under Part I. of the Act for dealing with unhealthy areas, and under Part III., to provide lodging-houses for the working classes, as follows :

As regards unhealthy areas, when the Medical Officer of Health reports to the Council, either on his own initiative, or after complaints to him by two Justices of the Peace or twelve ratepayers, (i) that in a certain area within the district the houses are unfit for human habitation, or that the bad condition and arrangement of the houses and streets is dangerous or injurious to the health of the inhabitants, and (ii) that the houses and streets can only be put in a sanitary condition by an improvement scheme for their reconstruction and rearrangement, the Council can, if convinced by the report, make such a scheme, provided its resources are sufficient. Provision must be made for housing the people displaced by the scheme ; and the amount of compensation to the owners is subject to the same rules practically as under Part II. of the Act as above (page 9).

The Council may, under Part III., purchase land and erect and keep lodging-houses for the working classes, or convert existing buildings into lodging-houses. The Council can also, with the consent of the Local Government Board, use any lands already in its hands for the erection of such lodging-houses, or purchase existing ones. The word "lodging-houses" includes separate houses or cottages, whether containing one or several tenements. A garden of not more than half an acre and of an annual value of £3 or under may be attached to a cottage built by the Council. For further details reference may be made to Fabian Tract No. 76.

The Council can provide and maintain recreation grounds and public walks ; and it possesses powers to take over open spaces in its district. In the case of Urban Sanitary Districts which are towns of over 6,000, public parks, which need not be within the town, can be acquired, and thus the districts outside a town may be benefited. Public libraries also can be provided by the Council or Commissioners of a town. A resolution adopting the Libraries Acts, 1855-94, can be passed by the Council. But it is open to any twenty or more voters to make a requisition to the Council, asking that the opinion of the voters in the district be ascertained. A poll is then taken by ballot. If it is objected that the expense of adopting the Acts is too heavy, and there is a neighboring district which has adopted the Acts, the expense can be reduced by the two districts combining. But as generally the rate for libraries is limited to a penny in the £,

this objection can rarely be honestly made against the provision of what is or ought to be a necessary institution in every town.

### County Councils.

County Councils are now established in every county in Ireland, and in the cities of Dublin, Belfast, Cork, Limerick, Londonderry, and Waterford, which are "administrative counties" under the Act. A County Council consists of a chairman and councillors, who are either (i) elected, or (ii) chairmen of the different Rural District Councils in the county, sitting on the County Council by virtue of their office ("*ex officio*"), or (iii) chosen by their fellow Councillors; for the Council may, at its first meeting, co-opt one or two persons to be Councillors, who must, however, be qualified to be Councillors like the rest. Vacancies caused by death, resignation or disqualification are also filled by co-option.

A Councillor is elected by each County electoral division, except in an Urban District, which may return more.

The election is held on the 1st of June in each year, or some day a week earlier or later as may be fixed by the County Council.

### What County Councils can Do.

The most important new power given to the County Councils, in addition to the powers of the old Grand Jury, is the power to acquire, purchase, take on lease, or exchange any land, or any easement, or any rights over or on land, or to erect and furnish any buildings, whether within or without the County, for the purpose of any of their powers or duties. Their principal duties are the following:—

1. The construction, repair, and care of main roads, bridges, and other public works.

2. The administration of the Food and Drugs Act, so as to prevent adulteration.

3. The management of Lunatic Asylums.

4. The support of County Infirmaries and Fever Hospitals.

5. The provision, either in conjunction with other local authorities or not, of Technical Education, whereby the children of the poor may obtain the advantages to be derived from better education and be assisted in this by means of Scholarships. The word "technical," applied to education, is now interpreted in a very wide sense: for example, the Technical Education Board of the London County Council gives every year about 700 Scholarships to the cleverest children in the London Board schools, each Scholarship carrying with it free education and from £8 to £35 a year for maintenance.

6. When the Guardians of any union satisfy the Council that exceptional distress exists in some district electoral division situate both in the Union and in the county, the Council can make an application to the Local Government Board, which may then authorize the Guardians to administer outdoor relief for any period not exceeding two months to poor persons in the division. And an occupier of more than a quarter of an acre may also be relieved outside the workhouse. One half the expense incurred in thus relieving exceptional distress is borne by the County. But it must not exceed a rate of threepence in the pound.

7. The making of bye-laws for the good government of the County and for the prevention of nuisances.

8. The power of opposing (but not of promoting) Bills in Parliament. This is to enable the Council to protect the interests of the County when they are threatened in Parliament.

9. Power, with the consent of the Congested Districts Board, and of the Board of Works, to take over, maintain, or reconstruct harbors, docks, piers, quays, and other marine works.

10. By the Tramways and Public Companies Act, 1883, the Grand Jury were empowered, on the failure of the promoters of any tramway company which was supported by a baronial guarantee, to complete, work, or maintain the undertaking if the baronies had paid money either for the completion, or, for two years, for the maintenance and working of the undertaking. The County Council can do the same; but it is also empowered to enter into agreements with any railway or tramway company whose undertaking is connected with the tramways of the Council, in order that they may be worked by the company. The proposed exercise of this power should always be opposed, and the working of the tramways by the Council itself advocated, because the Council can either run the tramways at cost price or else devote the profits to the good of the town, whereas the company works only for the profit of its shareholders, who are as likely as not to live in London or Manchester.

11. The administration (on the application of the Rural District Council) of the Irish Education Act, 1892, under which there is power to compel the attendance of children at school, and to appoint members of School Attendance Committees.

12. The County Council must appoint a secretary, a treasurer, and a County surveyor, and has power to appoint assistant surveyors and such further officers as it thinks necessary. The Local Government Board must, however, approve the appointment of the secretary, surveyor, and assistant surveyor. The salaries of those officers can only be fixed or altered with concurrence of the Board, whereas in other cases they are generally in the discretion of the Council.

The Council also appoints but cannot remove the coroner, and fixes his salary.

The preparation of the lists of voters and jurors is one of the duties of the secretary of the Council, though the existing clerks of unions may continue to do it during their lives. The printing of the lists, forms, registers or otherwise must be contracted for, after tenders have been obtained as in the case of other public works.

## **The Fabian Society in Ireland.**

### **IRISH POVERTY CONTRASTED WITH ENGLISH.**

It is hoped that the information given in this Tract will be useful to those who cannot afford to buy expensive handbooks of the new Act. The Fabian Society publishes it because it believes that the right business of politics is to improve the condition of the mass of the people, and wishes to show how that can be done without regard to the differences of class, creed, or race, which



create such disastrous divisions in national affairs. The first Tract issued by the Society on its foundation in 1884 was entitled "Why Are the Many Poor?"; and the Society has never since occupied itself with any other question. Within its ranks Irishmen, Englishmen, Scotchmen, and Welshmen have worked together, and are still so working, without any of the dissensions that have torn the Parliamentary parties asunder and broken the political force of the Irish people. It has always seemed to us absurd that Englishmen and Scotchmen, crowded by millions into the slums of London, Liverpool, Glasgow, and the big manufacturing towns, many of them paying four and six shillings a week for a room, or even a cellar in a filthy house, or scattered in country cottages where a workman has sometimes to pay half-a-crown a week for sharing one room and two beds with five other men, should be regarded as enemies—even as tyrants and oppressors—by Irishmen no worse off than themselves, and often a great deal better. It is a common thing in England for the slum landlord to evict a family which is a week behindhand with the rent in the bitterest weather and under the most inhuman circumstances. If the father of such a family reads in the newspaper that an Irish tenant has been evicted for being eighteen months behindhand, and that a whole nation with an organized parliamentary party and funds from America is agitating vehemently on his behalf, what can the unfortunate Englishman feel except that the Irishman is a good deal luckier than himself? He may forget the fact that the Irishman's livelihood is bound up with his holding; but his own grievance is none the less real for that. The plain reason why Englishmen care so little about the wrongs of Irishmen is that they suffer from just the same wrongs themselves on a much greater scale and often in a crueller form, and this, too, not because their country is poorer than Ireland, but because it is much richer. What the Fabian Society has to say on the Irish Question is exactly what it has to say on the English Question; and that is, that the workers of a nation have no enemies except the idlers of it; that the poor are always oppressed, no matter what government they live under; and that nothing will rescue the Irish and English worker from that common oppression except giving them control through their votes and elected representatives, not only over Parliaments which merely make laws and wars, but over public bodies which shall own the land they cultivate, and organize and conduct the industries in which they earn their wages. Both in Ireland and England, it is the landlord and employer, not the Lord Lieutenant and Prime Minister, who need control in the interest of the community. Without that control, Home Rule can be nothing to the Irish worker but a change in the Government's address. On the other hand, if the land of Ireland and the chief industries of Ireland pass into the hands of the County and District Councils, as they can and will in the long run if the Irish workers of all classes, creeds, and parties use their votes intelligently, then the people of Ireland will have more real and complete Home Rule and ownership of their own country than any nation now enjoys, whether the Imperial Government sits in London, Dublin, Montreal, Sydney, or St. Helena.

## What County Councils have Done for England.

In England, where democratic County Government is only ten years older than in Ireland, the new Acts (on which the Act for Ireland is modelled), have already made a remarkable change. In 1888, at the first County Council elections, when none of the Parliamentary politicians had a word to say as to the future of the Councils, the Fabian Society stepped in with a series of "Questions for County Councillors," which took the towns—especially London—by surprise, and captured them. Instead of the old divisions of Whig Liberal and Tory Conservative, which had lasted for two centuries, two new parties suddenly appeared, called Progressive and Moderate. The Progressives adopted the Fabian program, declaring that towns should be lighted and supplied with markets, waterworks, tramways, baths and laundries by the Councils instead of by Joint Stock Companies charging high prices and paying low wages to make profit for absentee shareholders; that the Councils should acquire land and build houses for the people; that they should establish Works Departments to build the houses, lay the drains, and paint the bridges themselves by their own directly-employed workmen, paying fair wages for an Eight Hours Working Day, instead of calling in contractors; and that they should agitate for powers to relieve the working ratepayer by throwing the burden of taxation on the ground landlords and other recipients of unearned income. A rich and powerful opposition, called the Moderate Party, was raised by the company shareholders, the contractors, the landlords, and, of course, the large body of people who are against all changes, for better or worse; but, so far, the Progressives are making headway; and "Municipal Socialism" is now an accepted part of English town life.

## What County Councils may do for Ireland.

If all this has happened in England in ten years, a much more rapid change may take place in Ireland, because the Irish people are undoubtedly much quicker to seize a political advantage and understand a political system than the English. For instance, the introduction of the ballot and the extension of the franchise to all classes, which have actually increased the strength of the English propertied classes in the House of Commons, instantly swept the Conservative Irish landlords out of politics. In too many of the English parishes, districts and counties, the English laborers and small farmers or shopkeepers have taken no notice of the new Councils, and are letting affairs drift along in the old way in the hands of the great landlords. Fabian speakers have repeatedly held up the Irish people as examples to the English of what political alertness and organization can do. And already the Irish people have justified them by filling the Councils in all directions with their representatives.

## How to Choose County Councillors.

Unfortunately, there is great danger of this capture of the new County Government by the Irish people being followed by a reaction. The duties of County and Parish Councillors cannot be discharged by mere political partizans and patriotic enthusiasts. They require

plenty of business capacity, hard work at prosaic details in committee, very little speech-making, and a character proof not only against the corruption which is always at hand when commercial interests are threatened, but against the temptation to be good-natured with public money, and to give public appointments, not to the most capable candidates, but to old friends or relations whose needs appeal to the pity of the Councils. The first thing every Council should do is to make arrangements, as the banks and insurance offices do, with some educational body, to examine candidates for County employment exactly as candidates for the Government Civil Service are examined. The medical officers should be in the front rank of their profession, not only in their scientific qualifications and public diligence, but also in their personal character and habits. And the more highly educated and better chosen the officials of a Council are, the solidier must be the character and worth of the elected representatives who are to control them. Therefore it is quite certain that unless the new class of representatives on the County and District Councils prove hard-working and business-like as well as popular and patriotic, they will manage things so badly and run the ratepayers into such expense that the country gentlemen will come back again at the next election. The County and District Councils are business bodies, elected to collect, invest and spend public money and to carry out public works; and it is useless to pretend that a man's fitness for such business depends on his being a Catholic or a Protestant, a Home Ruler or a Unionist. Even among those whose fitness for County work is undoubted, the same person may be an extreme Nationalist in Parliamentary questions, and a bigoted Conservative supporter of companies and contractors in County questions. And, conversely, the same person may be a first-rate municipal reformer (as Mr. Chamberlain was in Birmingham) and a leader of Unionist-Imperialism in Parliament. The Fabian Society therefore strongly urges the Irish County elector not to vote on Nationalist or Unionist lines at local elections, but to be guided solely by the candidate's fitness for the special work of the Councils and his views as to the treatment of labor and the policy of getting the land and industry of the district under public control.

If readers desire any information about the new Act which cannot be found in this Tract, they should write to the Secretary of the Fabian Society, 3 Clement's Inn, London, W.C., who will freely answer any questions.

Copies of the Act can be purchased for a shilling from the Government publishers, Hodges, Figgis & Co., Ltd., 104 Grafton Street, Dublin. The official title is Local Government (Ireland) Act, 1898, 61 & 62 Vict., ch. 37.



# PUBLICATIONS OF THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

It is impossible to give here a complete list of the publications of the Fabian Society; but the following selection will be found specially useful to those interested in the great possibilities of social reform opened up by the Local Government Act:

## THE FABIAN MUNICIPAL PROGRAM.

- Tract 37. A Labor Policy for Public Authorities.**  
" **81. Municipal Water.**  
" **90. Municipalization of the Milk Supply.**  
" **91. Municipal Pawnshops.**  
" **92. Municipal Slaughterhouses.**

The above Tracts are sold at the rate of Six a Penny, or a Shilling a Hundred.

**Tract 84. The Economics of Direct Employment,** with an account of the Fair Wages Policy. 16 pages.

This important Tract will enable any Councillor to dispose authoritatively of the common objections to Local Authorities doing their own work without the intervention of contractors. Like all the Fabian Tracts, it gives facts and figures as well as arguments.

**Tract 86. Municipal Drink Traffic.** The Right Way to Deal with The Drink Question.

**Tract 77. Municipalization of Tramways.** This gives recent facts and figures on the subject.

The above each price One Penny, or Ninepence a Dozen.

## LOCAL ELECTIONS.

Valuable hints for heckling Candidates at these elections can be gained from the Fabian Series of Questions for Town Councillors, County Councillors, Urban District Councillors, Rural District Councillors, Tenants' Sanitary Catechism, etc., each sold at Six a Penny, or a Shilling a Hundred.

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